

# Study Committee on Adoption

*Wednesday, March 11, 2015 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.*

*Indiana State Library, Author's Room*

**Members present:** Jane Bisbee, Chair; Michele Jackson, adoptive mother and adoption attorney; Gregg Ellis, Guardian ad Litem/Child Advocates, Marion County; Tamara Wilson, DCS Legal; Sharon Pierce/Acting Chair, Villages; Zachary Kester, adoptive father and adoption attorney; Karen Sauer, adoptive mother.

**Guests present:** Lindsey Craig, Parvonay Stover, Angel Owens.

**Commission staff present:** Lindsey Craig, Governor's Office Family Policy Director; Parvonay Stover, DCS Legislative Director.

## **I. Welcome:**

Jane Bisbee calls meeting to order. This is the fifth meeting of the Adoption Subsidy Committee, with two meetings remaining. This discussion will be about how we will put the final report together and the recommendations.

## **II. Approval of Minutes from January 14, 2015 Meeting**

Jane Bisbee entertains motion to approve previous minutes. Michelle Jackson indicates that minutes should reflect the fact that she was not present on January 14, 2015. Motion made to approve minutes with correction, passes committee vote, and meeting minutes of January 14, 2015 approved.

## **III. Presentation on Wendy's Wonderful Kids, Dave Thomas Foundation – Carrie Boerio and Angela Marshall**

Background given. 1992 Foundation was established to increase adoptions of children from foster care systems in North America. Those visions and values still drive and guide the foundation today. Foundation initially did a lot of public awareness. While successful in that, felt they needed to do more. In 2004 the Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK) Model was developed because a lot of money was being spent on child welfare, but not a lot was being accomplished. Discussion on the "Why" slide. Recently developed a Youth Voices video, as shown- Life After Foster Care. Discussion on exactly how the program works. Further discussion on components of the WWK Model.. Video shown - Unadoptable is Unacceptable. Carrie Boerio discusses specifics for Indiana and what that means. Estimates that Wendy Wonderful Kids has saved the State of Indiana \$10,012,400 (SEE ATTACHED POWERPOINT PRESENTATION).

## **Q and A:**

**Q:** Michelle Jackson - Have you noticed anything in Indiana that has been a hindrance in the process?

**A:** A couple of aspects of the model that recruiters need to resolve. 1) Reviewing the case file to glean possible people that might be a connection to the child, or for possible adoption, and 2) Looking back at birth family, perhaps to adopt, but to also connect and fill those gaps. Often these children want to reconnect with their birth family and better understand where they came from.

**Q:** Zac Kester - Do you have data that adoptions completed with your model have an increase on educational outcomes or various appropriate outcomes for the children?

**A:** The Dave Thomas Foundation has invested quite a bit of money in the first control group evaluation. Now they are investing in another five-year evaluation of outcomes after adoption. Currently doing interviews with youth who have been adopted and asking about well-being after aging out, etc. When this report comes out it will be interesting to see how they are doing after adoption.

**Q:** Gregg Ellis - What steps do you put in place (inaudible)?

**A:** Looking at the child in the center, his or her connections, both current and past and then spreading out. After all of that has been exhausted they reach out even further. Some recruiters do matching events or flyers about the children. Model does not necessarily encourage a public venue, media, etc, but they do from time to time utilize those activities. They also might reach out to people unknown to the child, but that might have a similar interest in something specific (i.e. art).

**Q:** Jane Bisbee - What is the average length of involvement for a child and what happens when no match is made?

**A:** Not sure what the average is, but will find out. Child can remain on caseload until family is identified. If child ages out of foster care without being adopted, recruiter would end up closing their case, but only 4% of children served age out without being adopted. Some children are on caseload for four years before they are adopted.

**Q:** Jane Bisbee - What is the timeframe to adoption?

**A:** About 18 months.

*(last question inaudible)*

**IV. Report on Red Tape and Legal Barriers Faced by Adoptive Families – Zac Kester, Committee Member**

- 1) Citizenship and immigration issues/birth certificate records. No way to prove child was born in the United States. Difficult to obtain a passport without specific paperwork. Can we streamline process for adoptive families?
- 2) Full faith and credit clause in US Constitution (specifically regarding the recognition of foreign decrees). There has been inconsistent application among Indiana courts in recognizing those foreign decrees.
- 3) How dense and complex the adoption laws in the State of Indiana are. Example: Laws regarding child placement agencies and the lack of regulations leave unanswered questions and a lack of clarity.

Zac has spoken to Brian Carnes, Judge Galvin, and several other colleagues in other states with similar issues.

**Possible solutions/recommendations**

Educational/Informational Awareness Brochure be developed with regard to the birth certificate knowledge and process that can point the courts and staff in the right direction in how to be aware of these citizenship/immigration issues.

Continued education for attorneys, specifically pertaining to full faith and credit issues, as well as citizenship/immigration issues (and how to streamline that process).

Potential overhaul or review of Indiana's adoption law – if that is “too big of a bite for” us we might identify areas that needs direct attention – one area is the license child placing agency registrations/certifications

*\*\*Minutes will reflect that Zac Kester makes further recommendation that there is a need for a federal immigration statute that would require states to modify the birth certificate when presented with another state's decree. Jane indicates this would likely be outside the scope of this committee. An interesting federal issue.*

**V. Begin Committee Discussion on Final Recommendations**

Final report is due in June. Plan is for Lindsey to begin working on that report after this meeting. The May 13, 2015 meeting will include final conversations. Goal is to begin now and work from interim report. Jane suggests that the actual recommendations be summarized in an executive summary.

## **Suggested Final Recommendations**

- Sustainability of the “conversation” through a subcommittee within the Commission on Children
- Review of the statutory language and process of adoption
- Centralized resource center in Indiana
- Resources for financial aspects of adoption
- Movement towards best practice

Committee will likely have 5 -10 recommendations.

No legislative updates.

At the next meeting committee should be prepared to finalize the recommendations. If there are questions or input about recommendations, email the adoption study committee or Lindsey Craig.

## **VI. Future Commission Meeting Dates**

- May 13, 2015 – 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
- June 10, 2015 – 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.